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Clues

TO DICKENS'S

"Mystery of
Edwin Drood"

BY

J. CUMING WALTERS

Author of "In Tarnish Again," "The Mystery
of Shakespeare's Sonnets," etc.

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CLUES TO DICKENS'S "MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD"

BY

(1) J. CUMING WALTERS

AUTHOR OF

"IN TENNYSON LAND," "THE MYSTERY OF SHAKESPEARE'S
SONNETS," ETC.

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DEDICATED
TO
THE PRESIDENT, VICE-PRESIDENTS, AND MEMBERS
OF THE
DICKENS FELLOWSHIP, ENGLAND,
AND THE
ALL-AROUND DICKENS CLUB, BOSTON, U.S.A.

Foreword.

TO anticipate and to meet the criticism that so large a volume is not warranted by the subject, it may be urged that not only has an endeavour been made to elucidate the series of mysteries in "Edwin Drood," but other solutions have been examined, and Dickens's methods of work analysed. The object has been so to arrange the arguments that they lead to one irresistible conclusion, and it is only by such a process that the truth is likely to be elicited. Those who begin with a theory may find passages to support it; but in this instance the essential passages are found first and then made to yield their secret. As it is so long since a serious attempt was made to uplift or to penetrate the veil which Dickens had cast over "Edwin Drood" one more attempt, on entirely new lines, may not be deemed unworthy of notice. A completion of the story is not offered. Here are only "clues" which may justly and with a good object be seized upon in the endeavour to understand and to arrive at the inner design of a labyrinthine plot.



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“Tot homines, quot sententiæ.”

CHARLES DICKENS : “A very curious and new idea . . . not a communicable one, though difficult to work.”

LONGFELLOW : “Certainly one of his most beautiful works, if not the most beautiful of all.”

AN EMINENT NOVELIST : “Far below what Dickens had before written.”

R. A. PROCTOR : “Far above the average of his other writings.”

GEORGE GISSING : “‘Edwin Drood’s’ paltry mystery . . . I cannot believe that we lost much by the non-completion.”

ANDREW LANG : “The plot is more of a mystery than it seemed to be.”

F. T. MARZIALS : “A good novel unquestionably. As for the mystery, I do not think that need baffle us altogether . . . We need have no difficulty in working out its conclusion.”

HAIN FRISWELL : “The work did not promise to be very good.”

T. FOSTER : “We have no direct indications of the end towards which the story was to tend.”

W. R. HUGHES : “An exquisite fragment . . . the mystery still unsolved.”

A. W. WARD : “It must be allowed that few plots have ever been more effectively laid than this, of which the untying will never be known.”

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CLUES TO DICKENS'S
"MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD."

Chapter I.

THE HALF-TOLD TALE AND THE METHOD OF
TELLING.

CHARLES DICKENS died June 9th, 1870. On April 1st of that year he had issued the first number of "The Mystery of Edwin Drood." It was to be completed in twelve monthly parts. Only three had been published when death overtook him; another three were in manuscript, and subsequently published; but there was not, with the exception of a rough draft of a discarded chapter, one more line or note to be found. The author had carried his secret to the grave, with just one-half the work completed.*

* Forster, the biographer, mentions that the last instalment was two pages short. "The last page of 'Edwin Drood,'" he says, "was written in the Châlet [the Swiss Châlet presented to him by Fechter] in the afternoon of his last day of consciousness. . . . He had worked unusually late in order to finish the chapter. It has very much the character, in its excessive care of correction and interlineation, of all his later manuscripts."

The purpose of "Edwin Drood" was not literary in the purest sense. Dickens had achieved all that was possible to him in that respect. As a maker of plots of the truly dramatic order he had only distinguished himself on a few occasions. Both during his lifetime and since his death he incurred the criticism of deficiency in that respect. But he had become possessed with the idea that he could frame a plot entirely novel, original, and baffling. The elucidation was to be his own secret, and a surprise to the reader. He prided himself on having hit upon something "very new and curious," "not a communicable idea . . . very strong, though difficult to work." The interest also was "steadily to work up" from the first. It becomes a most interesting problem whether Dickens was equal to his self-assigned task. Most of the critics say he was not, or, by offering a poor solution to his story, show that they had little faith in his ability and no conviction of the truth of his assertion.

"One defect forced upon our attention," wrote George Gissing, "is characteristic of Dickens: his inability to make skilful revelation of circumstances which, for the purpose of the story, he has kept long concealed. This skill never came to him. . . . There can be no doubt that the revealing of the mystery

of 'Edwin Drood' would have betrayed the old inability." Mr. Marzials and Mr. Lang are of the same opinion. But the fact is overlooked that it was exactly this task that Dickens had set himself—to overcome the old difficulty, and to prove he was equal to doing that which he had so frequently been told he could not accomplish. We must judge him on new lines, give him credit for new intentions, when we come to "Edwin Drood." And even Mr. Gissing, the adverse critic, admitted in defiance of his previous contention that "Edwin Drood" would "probably have been his best-constructed book: as far as it goes, the story hangs well together, showing a care in the contrivance of detail which is more than commonly justified by the result." Seldom has a serious critic within a few pages expressed such diverse opinions. There are others, however, who hold "Edwin Drood" lightly or in contempt, and declare that the mystery is no mystery at all. It is so easy to say this when the first guess is made—and that guess a wrong one. The fact that the mystery has been "solved" a dozen times in a dozen different ways, that there is divergence of opinion as to the whole scheme of the work, that Richard Proctor believed the story would end "pleasantly," and that others are equally convinced it would close in blackest tragedy—

surely all this indicates that the mystery was a very real one after all.

In reality, though the facts are seldom recognised, there are two leading mysteries, and one other, almost as confusing in its possibilities, which is subsidiary.

The first mystery, partly solved by Dickens himself, is the fate of Edwin Drood. Was he murdered?—if so, how and by whom, and where was his body hidden? If not, how did he escape, what became of him, and did he reappear?

The second mystery is—Who was Mr. Datchery, the “stranger who appeared in Cloisterham” after Drood’s disappearance?

The third mystery is—Who was the old opium woman, called the Princess Puffer, and why did she pursue John Jasper?

The two first mysteries are bound up in each other. The third has no direct connection with the fate of Edwin Drood, and must be treated as a detached episode.

Dickens had sufficiently progressed with his work to enable the first problem, embodying his leading idea, to be solved almost conclusively on the evidence he had supplied. There are so many clues to John Jasper’s design and actions that insuperable difficulties no longer present themselves to impede our arriving at a definite



The Gatehouse of Cathedral Close, Cloisterham.

(The Rochester Scene referred to in "Edwin Drood.")

conclusion. Yet there is far from unanimity as to what the conclusion should be. Jasper failed and Drood escaped, argue one side. Jasper succeeded and Drood was slain, argue the other. If this difference arises on the mystery which was more than half explained, how much greater must the conflict of opinion be on the remaining mysteries which are left entirely open to conjecture!

Had Dickens lived to complete his project there is little doubt that the first mystery would have proved to be relatively the most important. Owing to the manner in which the work was left, the minor problems in the undeveloped portions—those problems only just presented in outline—become far more baffling. In other words, the creator of the plot had said enough to dissipate obscurity on the main theme, but he had advanced so little in the subsidiary portion as to leave the interpretation entirely open to individual judgment. We can deduce the fate of Edwin Drood with almost mathematical certainty from the clues supplied. When we try to learn by what agency the truth was to be revealed, and what person or persons were to play the part of Nemesis, we only handle the most delicate threads, any of which may snap in a moment.

Dickens, who was working enthusiastically

to the last under the belief that his purpose had succeeded, and that the secret had not been discovered, made it no small part of his ingenious design to lead readers to believe that the discovery was easy. His crowning triumph would have been to confound that mass of superficial solvers who have since arisen. "Edwin Drood" is in more than one way the most deceptive book that Dickens ever wrote. It abounds in pitfalls and in "blinds." It seems to yield up most of its secrets at the first perusal. But the experience of those who have read it oftenest is that the seemingly obvious explanations must be suspected or ignored. We have to pierce deep to get to the core. The subtlety with which Dickens lures his readers confidently on to false ground is one of the most important successes to be placed to his credit. "Edwin Drood" is perhaps the profoundest and most complex problem presented in this class of literature. Dickens displayed consummate science in the precision with which he arranged every detail, and weighted with significance the minutest facts. How well he threw the hunters off the trail can best be understood by examining the contradictory results of the most expert attempts to solve the mystery.

It may at once be stated that neither from

data left by Dickens, nor from memoranda discovered, has any sequel been justified. "Nothing had been written," John Forster said, "of the main parts of the design excepting what is found in the published numbers; there was no hint or preparation for the sequel in any notes of chapters in advance. . . . The evidence of matured designs never to be accomplished, intentions planned never to be executed, roads of thought marked out never to be traversed, goals shining in the distance never to be reached, was wanting here. It was all a blank." Forster proceeded, a few pages further on, to show that it was *not* all a blank, and that an early draft of a Sapsea scene—"How Mr. Sapsea ceased to be a member of the Eight Club," had been discovered. This chapter has at least one bearing upon the denouement. To this must be added the fact that Dickens's publishers have always repudiated any conclusion of a formal character, and have refused to commission the writing of one more word which would suggest that the unfinished work could be completed in the author's vein. By an act of effrontery an American volume bore on its title-page the names of Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens the younger, but the actual authorship was afterwards acknowledged.

In the same year that "Edwin Drood" was

begun and prematurely ended, Orpheus C. Kerr published in New York "The Cloven Foot: being an adaptation of the English novel, 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood' to American scenes, characters, customs, and nomenclature." This was followed up by the same author with "The Mystery of Mr. E. Drood" in the *Piccadilly Annual*, of December, 1870. Far more important was "John Jasper's Secret" (Philadelphia, 1871), a volume almost of the same size as the original work, and an attempt to supply the missing half. Two years later an extraordinary and fantastic work appeared, also of American production, from "the spirit pen of Charles Dickens," and was boldly announced as "Part II." of "Edwin Drood." In 1878 a Manchester lady, writing under the pen-name of Gillan Vase, published in three volumes "A Great Mystery Solved; being a sequel to 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood.' " The actual value and the literary merits of these volumes were discussed by the critics, who, on the whole, were unfavourable and even scornful. The interest of the various sequels is purely of a negative character so far as our present purpose is concerned, inasmuch as none of them suggests any such solution as is offered in these pages. Doubtless the most serious contribution was Proctor's "Watched by the Dead" series of

articles (in answer to the *Cornhill Magazine* of February, 1864) which originally appeared in *Knowledge*, and a summary of which was reprinted in his "Leisure Readings" in 1882, under the pen-name of "Thomas Foster." His theory was that Jasper's scheme failed, and that Drood re-appeared as Dick Datchery. He offered many ingenious suggestions, but left important points untouched or unresolved. His conclusion was particularly weak, and a number of his dogmatic assertions will not stand examination. He entirely misunderstood the meeting of Datchery with the opium woman, and all that the conversation and the actions imply; he did not properly account for the record of the chalk marks; and he was absolutely mistaken in declaring that "everyone of the *dramatis personæ*, except Drood himself, can be shown to be for one reason or another out of the question"—that is, so far as the "Datchery assumption" is concerned. But *no conclusion can be held to be good and justified which departs from Dickens's own lines*. We must take it that the author's case has been duly presented, and from that presentation we must elicit the answer to the enigma.

Chapter II.

THE STORY ANALYSED.

THE ingredients which go to the making of the plot of "Edwin Drood" are so numerous that a mere recapitulation of the "points"—none omitted, however slight or casual, lest we should lose a clue—becomes an unusually long and difficult process. Dickens has given us, as it were, the medley details of a Chinese puzzle which we must piece together as best we can after ascertaining the precise value of each, and discovering their appointed places.

The points in the story, catalogued in the briefest style, are these—

Edwin Drood and Rosa Bud were betrothed by their dead parents. They grew up liking each other, but were not in love.

John Jasper, Drood's uncle, only a few years his elder, is madly in love with Rosa. She knows it, and fears him. Jasper is a musician, and as Lay Precentor at Cloisterham Cathedral is much respected; but secretly he is addicted to the opium vice, and haunts a den in London.

Jasper affects the most extravagant regard for Edwin Drood, but none the less is jealous

of him, and resolves to murder him. His plan is to strangle him with a silk scarf, and cast the body into one of the vaults in the Cathedral.

A pompous auctioneer named Sapsea has lately buried his wife. Jasper spends an evening with him, and is introduced to an eccentric drunken mason, "Stony" Durdles, who has the keys of the crypt and the tombs. Jasper handles the keys, clinks them together, and detects the peculiar sound given out by the one that unlocks the Sapsea vault. Thus he would, if in the dark, know the key by its weight and sound.

But Durdles gives Jasper the unexpected and startling information that he can by tapping with his hammer tell whether any vault contains one body or two, and whether the corpse has turned to dust or not. Jasper consequently inquires into the action of quicklime, which, he is told, will consume everything—except metal.

An incident to be noted is that whenever Durdles is out "arter ten" he is pelted home by a boy called "Deputy"—a gamin connected with a cheap Lodging House. Jasper is greatly enraged on encountering this watchful boy, and they regard each other with the greatest antipathy.

New characters are now introduced—Neville

and Helena Landless, twins, who have had a wild and unhappy youth in Ceylon with a harsh stepfather, and are brought by an aggressive self-styled philanthropist, Mr. Honeythunder, to Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon, to be disciplined and educated. Neville, resenting Drood's cool treatment of Rosa (with whom he falls in love at first sight), quarrels with him. Jasper adroitly foment the ill-feeling, and then reports to the Canon that Neville is dangerous, and that Edwin's life is in jeopardy.

In the meantime Edwin and Rosa, after consultation with Mr. Grewgious, Rosa's "angular," old-fashioned, good-hearted family solicitor and guardian, decide to break off their engagement. Jasper is not told because Edwin thinks the news would distress him.

Grewgious had given to Edwin a ring—"a rose of diamonds and rubies delicately set in gold"—to place on Rosa's finger if the marriage were fixed. This Edwin now retains, and it is the one piece of jewellery in his possession of which Jasper knows nothing.

We now have the preliminaries of the story, and the leading personages are all introduced. From this point the development is rapid, and every event must be taken as moving the story onward to its climax. At the same time nothing is explained, and most of the occurrences are

susceptible of more explanations than one. We might compare it to traversing a dark road along which signals are constantly flashed out; yet the signals themselves may be delusive to the uninitiated, and some which beckon us on may be positive warnings to stand back. Dickens's ingenuity was devoted to the placing of these false lights.

Jasper next visits the Crypt with Durdles, who tells him of a strange dream he had the previous Christmas Eve, when he heard "the ghost of a cry." Jasper drugs Durdles, watches the effects, and then examines the vaults at leisure. Dickens calls this "the unaccountable expedition."

An arrangement is made for Neville and Edwin to meet at Christmas at Jasper's house and end their feud.

On that day Edwin meets in Cloisterham an old opium woman, who says she is searching for some one, and tells him that "Ned," which Jasper alone calls him, is "a threatened name."

Neville prepares to start on a lonely walking tour on the morrow.

At night, a night of terrific storm, the meeting takes place: in the morning Drood has disappeared.

Jasper at once accuses Neville, who had been with Edwin to the riverside at midnight, of

murder. The case breaks down for want of evidence, but a dark suspicion remains. Neville goes to London, and takes a room near Mr. Grewgious's chambers. His sister remains for a time in Cloisterham, and lives down malignity.

Canon Crisparkle finds Drood's watch and chain and scarf pin in the river. This confirms the suspicion of foul play. Jasper resolves to devote himself to finding and destroying the murderer.

Grewgious tells Jasper of the broken engagement. The news has an extraordinary effect on him, and he swoons.

The second section of the story, which is all mystery, may be said to conclude here, and the third, which would have begun the elucidation, opens.

When some months have passed a mysterious stranger arrives in Cloisterham. He has a big head of white hair, and black eyebrows. His name is Dick Datchery, "an idle buffer living on his means." He takes lodgings at Tope's, next to Jasper's, and at once makes the latter's acquaintance.

Jasper now boldly avows his love to Rosa. She flies to Grewgious. He for some time has been observing Jasper's stealthy visits to London.

An arrangement is made whereby Rosa and

Helena can meet unobserved in the rooms of a young sailor, Mr. Tartar. The story pauses whilst an amusing description is given of Rosa's experience with Mrs. Billickin in lodgings, and of Mr. Grewgious's curious relationship with his clerk, Bazzard, the unsuccessful writer of a tragedy.

We next trace Jasper back in the opium den, babbling to the eagerly-listening old woman of a strange journey he undertook with a companion. She tries to learn more from him, but fails, and follows him to Cloisterham. There she meets Datchery and informs him of her previous meeting with Edwin Drood. She inquires after Jasper, goes to the Cathedral, hears him sing, and menaces him with her fist. Datchery observes this, and as he is keeping an account of all he learns by the old-fashioned tavern methods of chalk marks, he goes home and "adds one thick line to the score."

And here the story abruptly ends.

Here, too, the whole speculation as to the author's designs begins. The triple mystery has been presented; the triple solution is to be sought.

Proctor's theory is that Dickens, as in "Hunted Down," intended the supposed murdered man to watch the deluded and baffled murderer. Drood, who disappeared after the

attack, returned to Cloisterham disguised as Dick Datchery, in order to convict Jasper. Had this been the plot it would have been so very commonplace, melodramatic, and even amateurish, that we could but assume Dickens had deceived himself as to the "incommunicable idea." But what is the alternative? To ascertain this, we must learn as best we may, what, according to the author's design, was to be the actual fate of Drood. Was he to escape, and if so, how? If his life was to be preserved, what purpose would be served in concluding the story? If he perished, how was the crime to be discovered, and its perpetrator brought to justice? These are the questions now to occupy attention, and they demand a close analysis of Dickens's methods which, if it should do nothing else, at least will increase admiration for the resource and ingenuity of the brain that planned the mystery.

Chapter III.

THE FIRST MYSTERY: DEAD OR ALIVE?

WAS Edwin Drood murdered?

That his murder was intended, and that it was planned with the utmost circumstance and precision by John Jasper, is not a part of the mystery. The motive for the crime, the desperate determination of the uncle to remove from his path the nephew who stood between him and Rosa Bud, seems comparatively slight unless we study and understand Jasper's nature.*

Jasper believed that the marriage of the betrothed pair was inevitable and imminent, and it had not entered into his philosophy that they might separate of their own free will. He was therefore resolved upon a crime which was subsequently proved to be unnecessary, all of which perfectly accords with the version of the story so far as it was made known by Dickens

* Dickens seems to have felt this. In Chapter XX. he puts into Rosa's lips the words "'What motive could he have?'" She was ashamed to answer in her mind 'The motive of gaining me!' and covered her face as if the lightest shadow of the idea of founding murder on such an idle vanity were a crime almost as great."

to John Forster. The idea from first to last was murder, followed by a confession in the condemned cell. Those who accept the theory of Drood's escape must believe that Dickens's well-formed plot underwent a change, and must account for the condemnation of Jasper as best they may. They must also reject the whole of Forster's explanation as he had it from Dickens (see Book XI., chap. ii., of "Life").

As further bearing out the fact that it was actual murder that was to be the basis of the plot, and not an attempt at murder that failed, it should be mentioned that in Rochester itself, which is Cloisterham, a real event is believed to have provided Dickens with his idea. The story is given in W. R. Hughes's "Week's Tramp in Dickens-land." A well-to-do person, a bachelor, was the guardian and trustee of a nephew (a minor), who was the inheritor of a large property. The nephew went to the West Indies and returned unexpectedly. He suddenly disappeared, and was thought to have gone on another voyage. The uncle's house was near the site of the Savings Bank in High Street, and when excavations were made years later the skeleton of a young man was discovered. The local tradition is that the uncle murdered the nephew, and thus concealed the body. Here is the germ of the plot of "Edwin Drood," and

the mystery is not so much the nature of the crime as its concealment and eventual detection.

Jasper was an artist in temperament, an artist in crime. He was well aware of the use of drugs. He tried them on himself as an opiate; he tried them on Neville Landless as a stimulant; he tried them on Durdles as a sleeping draught. To kill a man was easy; to kill him in a new way and leave no trace of him called for a master-effort. The inventive and resourceful artist was equal to both tasks, just as he was equal to building up the strongest case of suspicion against an innocent man.

Having duly inveigled Neville Landless, he proceeded to put his terribly remorseless plot into execution. The whole idea was worthy of the artist's conception. At a convenient moment—one when Neville would be most compromised—Drood was to be encountered near the Cathedral, drugged, and then strangled with the black silk scarf that Jasper wore round his own neck. His body was forthwith to be hidden in a vault, one not likely to be disturbed for some time. The crime would be committed at night—by calculation, on a moonless night—and Jasper would therefore have to make every preparation for working in complete darkness. He must know the exact position of the vault, and reach it quickly and unerringly. He must

be able to single out the key from a bunch by weight and sound, not by sight. The merest clink would suffice for his practised ear.

But Durdles had startled him by boasting that by merely tapping a vault with his hammer he could detect whether it contained one body or two, something solid or merely dust. "Just you give me my hammer," said Durdles. "You pitch your note, don't you, Mr. Jasper? So I sound for mine. I take my hammer and I tap. Tap, tap, tap. Solid! I go on tapping. Solid still! Tap again. Holloa! Hollow! . . . There you are. Old 'un crumbled away in stone coffin, in vault!" (Chap. V.) Jasper was doubtless not only astonished, as he said, at the man's faculty, but secretly alarmed. What if Durdles should go tapping Mrs. Sapsea's tomb, and discover there was something in it that was not there before? The bare suggestion of this hitherto unthought-of danger was enough. Jasper could incur no risk. A few more questions and his mind was made up. Directly the second corpse was in the vault it must be covered with quicklime, "which will eat your boots, and with a little handy stirring eat your bones."

But it will not destroy metal. Consequently Drood's jewellery—a very small amount, of which Jasper had a complete inventory—must

be otherwise disposed of. The ready brain of the artist sees another chance here. Remove it from the body, cast it into the river (where, of course, it will not float away), select a spot where it is likely to be found, trust to its discovery, or, in the worst event, personally lead to its discovery, and then follow up the suggestion that Drood has been drowned. Better still if foul play can be mooted, and if the man upon whom suspicion is to be fastened can be enticed to the river in Drood's company just before the commission of the crime. Then there is not only a powerful false clue as to the nature of the tragedy, but an additional link in the chain of circumstantial evidence being forged against the guiltless person.

Such was the plot. Was it carried out? No, say the majority of the theorists, Proctor loudest of all. In some miraculous and mysterious way Edwin Drood escaped, although the attempt at murder was made, and although Jasper himself, the consummate artist, was confident that it had succeeded perfectly. The escape must indeed have been marvellous. Drugs, strangling, and quicklime were alike of no avail. Something was done, because Drood's jewellery was removed. Something which carried conviction to the murderer's own mind was done because Jasper was perfectly

easy on the subject—he accused Neville, he betrayed himself to Rosa, he could afford to be threatening and defiant. No fear of Drood's return haunted him. He was even bold enough to say to Rosa—and it reads like a covert hint of his deed—"Judge for yourself whether any other admirer shall love you and live, whose life is in my hand." The sentence is packed with meaning. He had rid himself of the one nearest and dearest to him, and what others would he not sacrifice without a qualm? If Drood were not dead, if Jasper had left the slightest loophole of escape, then what a fool this clever villain becomes.

But, the theorists argue, Drood is merely in hiding, allowing Neville Landless to be falsely accused of murder, under arrest for a time, and in terrible danger; allowing Helena Landless, whom he admired, to rest under the darkest cloud of malignity; allowing Rosa, once his sweetheart, afterwards his cherished friend, to be persecuted by the man he must have known to be a monster; and then re-appearing months later as Dick Datchery to watch his assailant and to obtain roundabout evidence of the guilt of which he was already aware.

"Fancy can suggest no reason," writes Mr. Andrew Lang, "why Edwin Drood, if he escaped from his wicked uncle, should go spying

about instead of coming openly forward. No plausible, unfantastic reason could be invented." Yet this is the theory which up to the present almost has the field to itself, and a chief argument set forth in its favour is the ingenious one that this "watched-by-the-dead" idea was one of Dickens's favourite methods of working. This point must be considered.

It is correct, and it is striking enough, that Dickens on several occasions caused supposed murderers to be watched by their supposed victims. We immediately recall the case of John Rokesmith in "Our Mutual Friend," which, however, Dickens said he never intended to be regarded as a mystery, but was "at great pains to suggest." Better still, we recall the case of Meltham in that powerfully dramatic story "Hunted Down"—a story written quite in the Drood vein: Meltham, who watched his murderous enemy awake and asleep, and "rifled every secret of his life." In a minor way, and with some change, the case of Nadgett who watched Jonas Chuzzlewit may also be cited. Admitted that these coincidences are vivid, strange and suggestive, they are still singularly inconclusive. Dickens promised an insoluble mystery, a new idea that had struck him as original, a secret which he could not communicate. Was it likely, was it reason-

able, that he would in 1870 offer as a novel and incommunicable idea, the mystery he had "taken no pains to conceal" in "Our Mutual Friend" in 1864, and the mystery which he had utilised to the utmost, and resolved, in "Hunted Down" so early as 1859? In other words, why should he vaunt of a problem which was hard to guess if he had given the answer in two previous volumes which he did not even pretend were of a baffling character?

It is most important and most significant to know that Mr. Luke Fildes, the artist selected to illustrate "Edwin Drood," utterly rejects the late R. A. Proctor's "Watched by the Dead" theory. He is convinced, so the late Mr. W. R. Hughes (author of "A Week's Tramp in Dickens-land") learnt from him first hand, that "Dickens intended that Edwin Drood should be killed by his uncle; and this opinion is supported by the fact of the introduction of the 'large black scarf of strong close-woven silk' which Jasper wears for the first time in the fourteenth chapter of the story, and was likely to have been the means of death—*i.e.*, by strangulation. Mr. Fildes said that Dickens seemed much surprised when he called his attention to this change of dress—very noticeable and embarrassing to an artist who had studied the character—and appeared as though

he had unintentionally disclosed the secret. He further stated that it was Dickens's intention to take him to a condemned cell in Maidstone or some other gaol in order that he might make a drawing. 'Surely this,' remarked Mr. Fildes, 'points to our witnessing the condemned culprit Jasper in his cell before he met his fate.' " Mr. Hughes added that Charles Dickens, junior, informed him that "Drood was dead," and that "his father had told him so himself."

The fact is, it is exactly because he had worked on the "watched-by-the-dead" lines before that we must look for something entirely different in "Edwin Drood." The "recurring idea" theory fails.

The further question has seldom presented itself: Why should Drood expose himself to failure and danger in learning everything that came to him in one flash of terrible revelation, and why should he allow a monster, whose power of mischief he knew, to remain at large and add to his crimes? In the case of Meltham and Rokesmith there were circumstances which justified the process; in the case of Drood, none. By revealing himself he would have removed all danger to those who were dearest to him, and who were doubly imperilled by his non-discovery.

Nor is this theory, which fails entirely on

facts—which, too, as I shall presently show, would only lead to a weak and an illogical conclusion—supported in the slightest measure when tested by what is known as “literary art.” No author who understands his craft loads his work with unnecessary details. No one erects a stupendous fabric if it is to remain empty. If Jasper failed, half the material that Dickens accumulated with such care, was wasted, and the solemn problem becomes an irritating inanity. More than that, the story as a story weakens, and Drood, who is little more than a name-label attached to a body, a man who never excites sympathy, and whose fate causes no emotion, is saved for no useful or sentimental purpose, and lags superfluous on the stage. All of which is bad art, so grossly bad, that Dickens would never have been guilty of it.

Proctor, who adopts the theory of a survival and resurrection of Edwin Drood, can conceive no better ending for him than this:—

“Rosa was to give her hand to Tartar, Helena Landless to Crisparkle, while Edwin and Mr. Grewgious were to look on approvingly, though Edwin a little sadly.” To topple over a well-constructed scheme and save a hero for an impotent purpose like this would have been quite unworthy of Charles Dickens.

Proctor’s special gift was in analysis, and he

minutely examines and cleverly explains Jasper's line of conduct. But the unfortunate part of his case is that, having proved everything possible, he immediately proceeds to show that everything was ineffective. Undoubtedly the best part of his work was his excellent elucidation of Dickens's most significant and most cunning chapters—the interview between Jasper, Sapsea, and Durdles, the examination of the keys of the monument, and the facts and the deductions to be drawn from those facts, of the “unaccountable expedition” of Jasper and Durdles to the crypt. His astronomical knowledge also came in useful in showing how Jasper had calculated on there being no moon on the night of the intended crime, and therefore the more reason existed for being able to distinguish by its weight and sound the Sapsea key in the dark. Proctor is excellent again in explaining the correspondence of Durdles' dream (while drugged) with Jasper's actual movements. “Jasper has taken from the sleeping stonemason the key of the crypt; has sounded the keys in the bundle; has assured himself which is the key he wants (the key of the Sapsea monument), and has gone out of the crypt, the door of which, we had been expressly told, they had locked on entering. How Jasper had employed the long time passed outside the crypt is not

clear. He had time to take the all-important key to his own room, and the solitude of the midnight hours would have allowed him to do so unobserved. He had time to have opened the monument, and to remove to it a quantity of the quicklime near the yard gate. What he is supposed actually to have done in the interval would have been told in the sequel."

But Proctor, strangely enough, attaches little or no importance to the ring which Edwin was to have given to Rosa. To support his theory he must necessarily abandon the most important clue that would have remained of the crime. He falls back on the idea that the ring, with its "invincible force to hold and drag," was one of Dickens's little deceptions. This is a weak evasion of a very great difficulty. We must conclude that Dickens was a poor artist indeed if he introduced this ring with so much impressiveness only "to mislead the reader," and to make no adequate use of it.

Proctor seems to be equally at fault when he declares that Edwin Drood was not of the class of characters doomed to die. The fact is, he is entirely uninteresting. He excites no emotion. We really know very little of him. His fate is only worth considering as a problem, and not as a matter of personal concern. He is almost colourless, and the little

told us of him shows him to be priggish, credulous, easily irritated. "His fatuity," writes Mr. Lang, "makes him entirely unsympathetic." He is certainly not of the class of characters that either Dickens or his readers would care to survive.

Finally, Proctor is absolutely wrong in his inferences concerning Datchery and the interview with the opium woman; he is even self-contradictory. His clever article excites a suspicion that the theory was formed before the evidence was minutely examined, and was then adhered to in spite of all that was opposed to it.

Forster's hints as to how the story was to conclude seem to me to mark out the line of progress to be followed. The theme, he tells us, was "the murder of a nephew by his uncle"—not an attempt at murder. The murderer was to confess all in the condemned cell, review his life, and admit the needlessness of the crime. And the discovery was to be brought about by means of a ring. These details exactly fit in with the theory now to be suggested, a theory which logically bases itself upon the fact that Dickens would not have planned a murder in such detail, and arranged the damning evidence to convict the perpetrator, if, after all, the scheme were to fail and the evidence to be rendered useless.

Chapter IV.

THE SECOND MYSTERY: "MR. DATCHERY."

EDWIN DROOD, then, must be accounted dead. Murder was plotted, and murder was done. It was Dickens's original idea, and the internal evidence all goes to show that he adhered to it.

The murderer was John Jasper. We trace every preparation, every movement, and every part of the design up to the moment that the blow was struck. And we know so well what course this artist in crime had mapped out, and we understand so thoroughly his inexorable character, that we can almost see the carrying out of the deed on that midnight of furious storm, of elemental strife.

Jasper was guilty of murder in his thoughts long before the crime was committed. "What is the matter? Who did it?" was the cry with which he sprang from a delirious sleep; and it must be linked on to his maudlin confessions in the opium den, after the crime, when he said—"I have done it hundreds of thousands of times in this room. . . . It was pleasant to do. . . . I did it so often, that *when it was really done*, it seemed not worth the doing,

it was done so soon." (Chap. XXIII.) The passages in his diary, before and after, tend to the same conclusion. He began with the "morbid dread of some horrible consequences resulting to my dear boy"; and the dark intangible presentiments of evil were of course fulfilled, as he intended they should be. "My dear boy is murdered."

But Dickens wished for his own purpose to keep the doubt alive, and so, in a later chapter, he endeavoured to ensnare the unwary by calling particular attention to the fact that "no discovery was made which proved the lost man to be dead." That was true. But remembering Jasper's plan, we easily arrive at the conclusion that it is exactly because Drood was dead that no evidence of the fact was possibly available. His body had been reduced to dust by quicklime. It is Jasper's bold conduct, his defiance of suspicion, his positiveness that, search as they all may, nothing will be found, which convinces us that the scheme was executed. And it is because all evidence seemed lacking that the one overlooked and unsurmised item of the ring was required. Fate turned upon that trifle.

In his sixteenth chapter Dickens showed what the case was against Neville Landless, and we see at once that it is poor, artificial, and uncon-

vincing. In the twentieth chapter he shows, not what was the case against Jasper, but what was the case *for* him. Here again we see the art that would, if possible, lead us on to a false trail. Rosa had suspected Jasper. On what grounds could he be accused? Could love for her have tempted him to murder his own kinsman? Yes, when it was revealed as so mad a passion, a consuming mania. Then Rosa argued speciously but plausibly thus—"He had persisted in treating the disappearance as murder. If he were afraid of the crime being traced out, would he not rather encourage the idea of a voluntary disappearance?" Dickens, eager to throw us off the scent, did not stop to show how much better for Jasper was the positive denunciation of Neville as the assassin, than allowing doubts to gather as they would because all was vague. In that case the accusation might settle upon himself any day; meanwhile, it was warded off. Jasper, in short, acted exactly as any keen-witted and far-seeing murderer might be expected to do.

Drood had disappeared never to be found again, and now the supreme question is—Will the secret, locked in one man's guilty heart, ever be discovered?

Thus we come to the real problem. After the crime, after the impeachment of Neville

Landless, after his acquittal for want of evidence, and after his departure for London, "a stranger appeared in Cloisterham." The exact time of his arrival is not divulged, but it was some months after the eventful Christmas, and probably summer. The stranger gave the name of Datchery, "Dick" Datchery. He announced his intention of lodging in the city for a month or two, "with a view to settling down there altogether." He took apartments with Tope, the verger, in the little house over the gateway, Jasper's room being exactly opposite. The question is—Who was Datchery? This is the actual mystery. This was the surprise Dickens had in store, steadily working up from the first. And it says much for his triumph that either this point has been belittled or entirely overlooked.

In dealing with the subject we must acquaint ourselves with Dickens's style and methods, and his means of obtaining dramatic effects. At the same time, though we cannot dissociate the man and his characteristics, we must be on the alert for all possible changes and the avoidance of repetition. In "Edwin Drood" Dickens evidently had arranged not only that his points should tell, but that none should be wasted; one and all are introduced for a specific purpose, and have their place in a definite plan. This

conclusion is enforced the more the story is read and analysed. Dickens thought his problem practically insoluble. Therefore, whenever he is apparently helping to a solution, suggesting explanations, offering to elucidate an obscure phrase or a dim fact, the correct attitude of the reader is one of scepticism. Dickens assumed, and events have justified him, that every one who concluded Drood was not dead would "jump" at Datchery as the missing man. The very obviousness of it should have acted as a warning; the very simplicity of it should have compelled the question—"Would this be so baffling?"

It becomes necessary to examine more closely the details of the story and the acts of the characters. We must arrive by a process of exhaustion at the conclusion as to who Datchery was; we must be able to say "it was this person or that because it can be no other"; and we must then see if that person could really act the part, and had a reason for doing so. We must next ascertain if Dickens himself had, secretly but none the less surely, marked out that person consistently, fitted that person for the task, and supplied that person with an adequate motive. Finally, we must learn whether throughout the course of the story he has deliberately diverted attention from that person so that the ultimate

surprise shall be complete. To assume that Datchery was the most obvious of all the characters who had come and gone is to reduce the mystery to juvenility.

Three points are apparent enough and need no argument—Datchery was someone in disguise, he had come to Cloisterham to watch Jasper, and he was seeking for evidence to convict Jasper of the crime of which he was suspected, but could not be pronounced guilty.

Datchery had a strong personal interest in tracking down the man, though whether the interest was confined to avenging Drood's death or went beyond that, we are not told. But the personal interest being obvious we must look for someone who had that interest, someone *inside* the story, and not a new or independent character, someone directly concerned in the sequel. We must also look for someone who, however strongly suspecting Jasper's guilt, has no substantial proof of it, but is compelled to search for that proof. Otherwise the elaborate and roundabout proceedings are foolish and unjustified. In the last place, let us look for someone who could temporarily disappear from real life in order to act the assumed part, and yet not be missed, one whose absence at the most would only be known to a few persons who would have every reason to

keep the secret. Datchery would, of course, be a person whom Jasper was unlikely to recognise even under a disguise, one he had seldom or never seen, one whose very voice was unfamiliar to him.

Who fulfils these conditions?

A few of the characters may be at once disposed of. Datchery could not be Sapsea, Durdles, Deputy, or Tope, if for no other reason than that by meeting and conversing with him (Chapter XVIII.) they are shown to be separate identities. He could not be the loud-voiced philanthropist Honeythunder, for he believed in the guilt of Neville Landless, and therefore would not spy on Jasper. He could not be Crisparkle, who could not disappear. He could not be Neville himself, who was definitely located in London, and would have every reason for avoiding Jasper. Other minor characters are equally out of court, have no motive, and it would be preposterous to suggest them. We are therefore reduced to a very few possibilities.

Was it Bazzard?

Mr. Grewgious, the solicitor, had a curious clerk who deemed himself superior to his master, because he had written a tragedy which no one would bring out. This Bazzard is sometimes mentioned as possibly being Datchery, chiefly

on the ground that he was a somewhat mysterious person, and that, when Rosa visited her legal adviser, she was told that Bazzard "goes his way, after office hours. In fact, he is off duty here, altogether, at present." But Bazzard is purely a burlesque character, and Mr. Grewgious, who affects to hold him in awe because he has written the tragedy which everyone has rejected, is in reality poking fun at the pretentious and stupid brother of Mrs. Billickin the whole time. Such a character would never be utilised for tracking down a murderer, and could not be expected to risk his own life in such an enterprise. Literary art rebels against the idea. Bazzard was one of Dickens's favourite low-comedy characters, and though he may have been introduced as a "blind," he certainly was never intended to serve a serious purpose. Datchery must have had a personal motive in watching Jasper: Bazzard had none, and at best could only have been hired for the task, which theory entirely destroys the value of Dickens's idea. But if Grewgious had given him this task, and been credulous enough to think him capable of performing it, he could not have sent him to Cloisterham until after he had heard Rosa's story of Jasper's perfidy. Yet Datchery had been in Cloisterham before that time—that is, before either Grewgious or Bazzard

knew of the urgent need for placing Jasper under supervision. The "big white wig"—so useless, so full of risk, unless necessary—would not have been required by Bazzard. The little we see of this ungainly and ridiculous person shows that he would have been unequal to putting on Datchery's demeanour; and the little we get of his fatuous conversation proves that he never could have talked as Datchery talked. He was purely an egotist, to be covered with ridicule and confusion at the end, and not to be reserved for a supreme act requiring strength of character, complete self-abnegation, and invincible courage. Therefore, Bazzard was not Datchery.

Was it Drood?

Suppose, after all, the theory of Drood's murder is incorrect. Does it then follow that he would re-appear in Cloisterham as Datchery? Proctor replies affirmatively, but forgets that his walk, his style, his figure, his voice would have been detected by Jasper. Drood would not have run needless risk in taking up his residence with the Topes who knew him so well, but would have gone to strangers as an additional precaution; nor would he have selected so close a proximity to Jasper, who had studied his every movement, and who, with the knowledge of his crime, would be on the alert when-

ever a possible spy came upon the scene. It is extremely doubtful from Dickens's delineation whether Edwin Drood, weak, hot-tempered, credulous, and impulsive, had the force of character for so exacting a rôle. There is nothing in Datchery to suggest Drood in even the slightest degree, and there is much to suggest a very different person. It is inconceivable that any man, knowing who had attacked him, and knowing of the danger lurking near others, should consent to conceal instead of to reveal himself. Dickens knew human nature profoundly. Let us give him credit for it in this, as in all previous cases; and let us give him credit for logical reasoning as well.

But Dickens, in a casual but ingenious manner, introduces one circumstance which should entirely dispel the notion that Datchery and Drood could be one and the same. On the eventful Christmas Eve Edwin had met and been greatly struck by the old opium woman. Her appearance had startled him because she looked like Jasper in one of his fits. He had given her money. She in return had warned him of the danger to "Ned"—a "threatened name"—the name that Jasper alone called him. In a few hours the warning was fulfilled. If Drood survived he would certainly remember the event.

Later on, Datchery met this same woman—and did not recognise her! He was startled when she told him her story. What was information to Datchery would have been an unforgettable personal experience to Drood; what was valuable new testimony gained by the one, would be stale news to the other. Therefore Drood was not Datchery.

Was it Grewgious?

We now come to a far more serious speculation. Mr. Grewgious was Rosa's guardian, and he paid a memorable visit to Jasper a few days after Drood's disappearance, to inform him of the broken engagement. The interview was remarkable alike for what was said and what was not said. "This is strange news" was his opening remark. His second was to bait Jasper as to his belief in Neville Landless's guilt. His third was—"I have a communication to make that will surprise you." He spoke in "a cool, slow manner" and "provokingly." Bit by bit, as if with design to cause the deepest wounds, he told of the severing of the relations between "the lost youth" and Rosa. He saw Jasper swoon at the news, and "wooden of aspect, sitting stiffly in his chair, watched his recovery." Undoubtedly Grewgious knew what Jasper really was. He was in the confidence of Rosa and Neville. He alone knew of the

existence of the betrothal ring. At a later stage he watched Jasper's stealthy movements in London, and he did not hesitate to denounce him as a scoundrel. On what evidence? Grewgious had every motive for convicting Jasper as the implacable enemy of Neville and the persecutor of Rosa. He probably suspected him of deeper crimes. He was a lawyer, and knew how to procure facts. He was stimulated by intense personal interest. The character of this man was steadily developed by Dickens as if he were reserved for an important part. London, his residence, was only half a day's journey from Cloisterham. His professional business could be done by Bazzard. Some of his private business he deputed to Mr. Tartar. The case for Grewgious grows decidedly strong.

And yet it falls to pieces: Grewgious, after all, is among the impossibilities. His character is as much against the idea as is his physique, and doubtless Dickens had a purpose in supplying such unmistakable details of each.

Datchery appeared in Cloisterham *before* Mr. Grewgious knew from Rosa's own lips how serious the state of affairs had become, and how necessary it was to keep a close watch upon Jasper. From all that we can learn he remained in London, and was at hand whenever wanted for consultation. If he had disappeared for

long periods there would have been a blank in the story, and his absence would have been conspicuous. The lawyer could not have gone masquerading, and he would have been doomed to failure had he tried. Jasper would have immediately detected the man of such marked angularity that no disguise could have concealed it.

The differences between Datchery and Grewgious stand forth with all the sharpness of absolute contrast.

Datchery was a man with "a military air." Grewgious, we are told, had a "shambling walk." Datchery had "a shock of white hair that was unusually thick and ample" (doubtless a large wig). Grewgious had no need of a wig of uncommon size, for he only had a "scanty flat crop of hair" and a "smooth head." Any disguise which attracted attention as a disguise was foolish—*unless necessary*. Grewgious had "short sight." Everything that Datchery did—his watching of persons at a distance, his quick observation of all that was passing—indicates that his sight was particularly keen. Grewgious had "an awkward and hesitating manner." Datchery had "a grand address," and spoke and acted in such a way that he could allow it to be inferred he had been a diplomat. Grewgious had "too much ankle-bone and

heel." Datchery was courtly, "made a leg" to the Mayor—a motion requiring grace and freedom of attitude—and gave the impression of one "accustomed to rank and dignity." Grewgious was notoriously and admittedly "an angular man." Datchery was all courtesy and formality, with perfect self-control. Grewgious spoke in jerks, and could seldom remember two sentences even in a prepared interview. Datchery was an amiable and fluent conversationalist. Grewgious had a marked individuality and an eccentricity that betrayed him. Datchery could sink his own characteristics and adapt himself to his company.

Of Datchery's actual appearance we really know little that would enable his portrait to be drawn, and, parenthetically, it is worth noting here that the original illustrations which Dickens supervised contained no figure of the mysterious stranger at all. But one fact is pushed into prominence. Though Datchery's hair was white (whether natural or artificial does not matter for the moment), his eyebrows, we are distinctly informed, were black. "A white-haired personage, with black eyebrows"—that is the description. We must assume for two sufficient reasons that black was the natural colour, first, because in any attempt at disguise the hair and eyebrows would have been made to correspond

to divert suspicion; and, secondly, because on close inspection a painting of the eyebrows would certainly have been detected. Black eyebrows betoken black, or at least dark, hair. But Grewgious's hair was "mangy yellow," like a fur tippet, and he was himself "an arid, sandy man," the colour of "high-dried snuff." This point needs no further enforcing. Every definite fact concerning Grewgious proves that he could not have been Datchery.

It was necessary to sweep away this case more than all the others in order to have the ground clear for the remaining solution, the only one, I venture to believe, which stands every test and meets every requirement.



Chapter V.

MR. DATCHERY BY DEDUCTION.

WHO, then, was the stranger in Cloisterham?

In pursuing this inquiry we are bound to give Dickens credit for the highest scientific skill, for a perfectly conceived plan, and for accuracy in the minutest details. We must exclude the idea of blunders, count on no oversights. Once we admitted faults we might just as well abandon the investigation. From the zest with which Dickens was continuing his work to the last moment we may safely assert that he himself was conscious of no defects.

His daughter tells us that on the morning of June 8th he was in excellent spirits, speaking of his book, at which he intended working all day, "and in which he was most intensely interested." He was at work in the Châlet, and on entering the house for an early dinner his silence and abstraction were attributed to his engrossing occupation. John Forster adds his evidence of how deep was Dickens's interest in the story as it developed, all of which goes to show that he himself believed it to be important

and worthy of his powers. He had read the first number to Forster "with great spirit" in October; and in December he read a fresh number aloud—that relating to Honeythunder—with "an overflow of humour." There is little doubt that he felt he was putting forth his best work and succeeding in his purpose.

We have seen who Mr. Datchery was not, whom he could not be. By the same process of examination let us discover who he was, whom he must have been. Dickens never intended the identification to be easy, but at the same time the identity, once traced, was not to be mistaken. When a false clue is followed the end of the story is confused, unconvincing, and weak. If the true clue is followed a conclusion is reached which is thoroughly sound and dramatically strong.

Suppose among the group of characters there was still one left, a little in the background yet a striking figure, seldom speaking but much spoken of; one who had an intense and instinctive dislike of Jasper, yet who did not fear him; one who had every reason to believe him guilty of foul play, yet who possessed not a shred of evidence; one who had the strongest reason for denouncing him to prevent his successful denunciation of others; one who must be keen in pursuing him in order to save Rosa Bud

and Neville Landless from his attacks; one who had enormous strength of character, who could disappear and yet not be missed, and who was already accustomed to disguise and knew how to act a second character: suppose such a person could be found, have we not laid hands on Mr. Datchery, and seen the real face beneath the mask?

There *is* such a person, a person who perfectly fulfils every condition. By putting that person in Datchery's place we account for everything, and we see the author's design fittingly crowned with a startling and admirable conclusion.

To understand this we must not only pick up the clues that Dickens has let fall all along the track, but we must notice what is adroitly concealed, and what is only half revealed.

Let us work backwards, and begin with Datchery's big wig, his streaming white locks, and his forgetfulness to put on his hat or his objection to wearing it. It has already been hinted that as the disguise was one that would arouse suspicion it was a foolish adoption "unless it was necessary." A big wig—"a shock of white hair unusually thick and ample"—was necessary and unavoidable if it happened that there was a woman's head of hair beneath it. The streaming false locks were a proper precaution if there were any risk that

a woman's long locks might escape from their folds. A woman would not be disposed to wear a hat, most of all a man's hat, on the top of her own hair surmounted by a wig. She would doubly object in warm weather, and it was summer time when Datchery appeared in Cloisterham. She would trebly object if she had been accustomed to the free customs of a tropical climate. A woman can wear a man's clothes with comparative comfort, but she cannot trust herself to wear a man's hat with absolute ease. Imagine her difficulty when a big wig is added! If Mr. Datchery were a man, his actions were absurd; if a woman, only what might be expected. But Datchery was a shrewd man with a serious mission. Was he likely to evince folly at the outset and court needless suspicion by laxity in the smallest of details? Even when he did wear his hat he did not know what to do with it, so, woman-like, placed it under his arm instead of balancing it in his hand. When his attention was called to the fact that he had omitted to put on the hat "he clapped his hand to his head as if with some vague expectation of finding another hat upon it." Natural enough when a wig was superimposed on a woman's hair, and when that hair happened to be abundant. The impression of "another hat"—not a man's hard hat, but a woman's

soft hat—is exactly the one that would be created. Datchery had a habit of “shaking his hair.” What man ever shook his hair? What woman does not? Datchery is a woman as plainly as the author can tell us.

This white-headed Datchery had dark eyebrows. Although a wig can hide the colour of the hair and cause a material change in aspect which can delude the observer, any attempt to alter the eyebrows would be detected on close inspection. Datchery dare not incur this additional danger. He was not a stage-actor, but was mingling with the crowd, was open to the closest scrutiny. We must therefore look for a woman who has dark eyebrows, and may not unnaturally be dark herself. Of Datchery’s complexion we have no description. But if the white wig were removed dark hair would certainly be found beneath it.

Leading characteristics must next be catalogued. Datchery had himself under complete control, was strong, resolute, self-confident; while affecting to be merely “an old buffer living idly on his means.” He could go straight to the room of the man suspected of ruthless murder and confront him. He had no fear of betraying himself, no apprehension of personal consequences. So well had his whole plans been prepared, so well considered were his

actions, that we could almost conclude that this was not the first time Datchery had acted a double part, had impersonated someone else. He spoke with ease to Jasper; he knew exactly how to conduct himself before the egregious flattery-loving Sapsea; he adapted himself to any conversation; he had no hesitancy in any respect. Durdles he could manage, and of the vagrant Deputy he could make a comrade. The woman for whom we search must be possessed of all the qualities that enabled her to accomplish this.

Datchery had a military air, a grand address, a well-bred style, an easy gait. The woman therefore must be stately, perhaps handsome, alert, intelligent, eager in her work, yet self-disciplined and patient. Vindictive she may be, and moved by passion; yet she will not be impetuous, and her object will be justice rather than revenge.

Datchery knew Cloisterham—the elaborate acting tending to show that he did not, sufficiently proves the fact. It was imperative that everyone should regard him as a stranger, and that Jasper in particular should be led to assume that he had no actual knowledge concerning Edwin Drood. Convinced as he may have been in advance of Jasper's guilt he had yet to obtain the proofs; otherwise the circum-

stances demanded the promptest action. But the only course open to this stranger was the slow, deliberate, sleuth-hound tracking down of the criminal, finding and following the trail, cautiously guarding against all mishap. The task was one that could only have been self-imposed for strong personal reasons which outweighed all thought of danger—and the motive was to save others who might in turn be the murderer's victims. Those victims were Neville Landless, unjustly accused and in peril of his life, and Rosa, ruthlessly beset and likely to lose her life's happiness. Datchery was someone linked with these two, someone to whom they were dear, someone who thought them worth rescue at any cost.

Does any woman in the story fit the picture?—a tall, dark, handsome woman, with a quick brain, an absolute command of temper, a fearless and determined spirit?—a woman who hated Jasper, and who loved Neville and Rosa?—a woman who had the patience and the courage to meet and defeat a cunning criminal of boundless malice and hostility?—a woman capable of acting a part and already familiar with the methods of disguise?—a woman with every motive for unmasking the suspected villain, for righting the innocent, for saving the persecuted, and, if necessary, willing to sacrifice her

own life for the honour of the one and the happiness of the other? Assuredly there is such a woman, marked out from the first and consistently portrayed throughout.

Her portrait is ever before us, though she herself is seldom on the scene. Her few words ring in our ears, though it is seldom she speaks. A cunning dramatist prepares us for his leading character by allowing others to arouse expectation. Thus did Dickens; and while this woman, reserved for the greatest work, lingered in the background, others made known her perfect competence for her task when the supreme moment should arrive.

A tall, handsome, gipsy-like girl with a mass of hair, and with dark eyes, described again and again. A girl with wild blood but with a controlled temper. A girl of imperious character. "An unusually handsome, lithe girl, very dark, and very rich in colour; of almost the gipsy type; something untamed about her; a certain air of huntress, yet of being the object of the chase rather than the follower. Slender, supple, quick of eye and limb; half shy, half defiant; fierce of look; an indefinable kind of pause coming and going in the whole expression, both of face and form, which might be equally likened to the pause before a crouch or a bound." (Chap. VI.) That is the first sketch.

“Half shy, half defiant,” when gently touched a very woman, when goaded desperate and invincible. Her girlhood had been tragic. As a child she was ill-used, whipped like a dog, and yet she would have allowed her cruel stepfather to “tear her to pieces before she would have let him believe that he could make her shed a tear.” To this woman Rosa, giving her first impression, had said—“You seem to have resolution and power enough to crush me. I shrink into nothing by the side of your presence.” And as they spoke a “masterful look” came upon this woman’s face.

We find many tributes to this woman’s capacity, both in learning quickly, in teaching, and in influencing others. Her attachment to Rosa was deep and lasting. Combined with that was her repugnance to Jasper, whose real character she had read at a glance. To save Rosa from his clutches she was ready to brave all things. She saw that the gentle orphan girl was afraid of this man with his sinister ways. “You would be afraid of him under similar circumstances, wouldn’t you?” she was asked. “Not under any circumstances,” was her emphatic reply. And after Jasper, positive of his own security, had revealed his passion for Rosa, this same woman expressed her intensity of feeling in the words—“You know how I

love you, but I would rather see you dead at his wicked feet. . . .”

Dickens, however, had long before this given the strongest hint of what part this woman was destined to play. When Rosa sang, and Jasper by his mere presence and looks frightened her, the grieving girl took refuge with the newly-made friend, whose “lustrous gipsy-face drooped over the clinging arms and bosom, and the wild black hair fell down protectingly over the childish form. There was a slumbering gleam of fire in the intense dark eyes. . . . *Let whomsoever it most concerned look well to it.*”

This is not only an unmistakable signal in itself, but a reminder of Dickens's methods of indicating far in advance a planned climax. Every student of his works is well aware how cleverly a phrase, an act, a characteristic would be recalled at a psychological moment for dramatic effect. Steerforth, sleeping, with his arm round his head, is found dead in that attitude. Mr. Chester dies with the forced smile on his face that throughout life had concealed his cruelty. The instruments of fate are always as clearly marked out. We see how Jonas Chuzzlewit is to come to his end, by what agency Sykes will be tracked to his doom, how Ralph Nickleby will be ensnared, who will compass the ruin of Wegg. Dickens, too,

liked to bring forth some "god from the clouds" at the critical moment. He began the process with the obscure Brooker in "Nicholas Nickleby," though the most striking example is Nadgett in "Martin Chuzzlewit." To the same type belong Compeyson in "Great Expectations," Miss Mowcher who secured the arrest of Littimer in "David Copperfield," Rigaud in "Little Dorrit," and Bitzer in "Hard Times," to name no others. Their own characters may be good or bad, attractive or repulsive, but they are cast for the part of Nemesis in the dramas to which they belong, and they fulfil their assigned mission. But the manner in which Dickens covertly conveyed his prophecies could not be better illustrated than in "A Tale of Two Cities," when Sydney Carton addressed Lucie Manette in these terms—"O Miss Manette, when the little picture of a happy father's face looks up into yours, when you see your own bright beauty springing up anew at your feet, think now and then that there is a man who would give his life, to keep a life you love beside you." Here is the perfect parallel in the way of forecasts—Sydney Carton indicated for his supreme task, just as this woman was marked for hers—"Let whomsoever it most concerned look well to it."

We have therefore the strong contributory

evidence of Dickens's own style that the avenger had been decisively foretold from the first. She was to emerge from obscurity at the critical moment. Her description we have discovered—a woman with dark hair and eyes, of stately mien, of good conversation. Her strength of character we know. Her personal motive we understand. Now we have the prophecy, too.

The name of the avenger was Helena Landless.

Chapter VI.

THE DATCHERY PROOFS.

“THE interest steadily working up from the first,” Dickens had assured John Forster. Now that we have named Helena Landless as none other than Dick Datchery, the stranger in Cloisterham, it is incumbent upon us to show that the theory accords with all that the author revealed of his design as well as that it affords the best explanation of the mystery and enables the story to be most fittingly concluded.

Helena was the sister of the man upon whom had been cast the suspicion of a foul murder. The shadow which rested upon him also cast its darkness over her own life. Her first task, then, was as far as possible to live down enmity and dissipate doubts. This is exactly what we find she did, and, in face of much difficulty, did with great success. When Neville went to London she stayed behind in Cloisterham. And in regard to that matter Mr. Crisparkle reported to Neville these salient facts:—

“Your sister has learnt how to govern what is proud in her nature. She can dominate it even when it is wounded through her sympathy

with you. No doubt she has suffered deeply in those same streets where you have suffered deeply. No doubt her life is darkened by the cloud that darkens yours. But bending her pride into a grand composure that is not haughty or aggressive, but is a sustained confidence in you and in the truth, she has won her way through those streets until she passes along them as high in the general respect as anyone who treads them. Every day and hour of her life since Edwin Drood's disappearance, she has faced malignity and folly—for you—as only a brave nature well-directed can. *So it will be with her to the end.* Another and weaker kind of pride might sink broken-hearted, but never such pride as hers: which knows no shrinking and can get no mastery over her. . . . She is a truly brave woman." The glowing tribute is one further indication of the supreme task Helena was to be set, and the justification for giving it to her.

Between the twin brother and sister there was a perfect understanding. Though no spoken word might pass between them they comprehended each other's minds, and were conscious of each other's acts. Psychologically they were one in spirit, though they had duality of existence. Helena dominated Neville, and this was the only difference between them. They had no secrets

from each other, and their dispositions were the same. What the one wished the other wished in sympathy, and what the one inspired the other would strive to translate into action. Neville's sorrow was Helena's sorrow, and Neville's hope was Helena's hope. What Neville would have done, Helena set herself to do.

"You don't know, sir," said Neville, "what a complete understanding can exist between my sister and me, though no spoken word—perhaps hardly as much as a look—may have passed between us. She not only feels as I have described, but she very well knows that I am taking this opportunity of speaking to you, both for her and for myself." (Chap. VII.)

How completely *en rapport* brother and sister were was immediately afterwards exemplified when they met, and "an instantaneous recognition passed between them, in which the understanding that had been spoken of flashed out."

Earlier in the story there had been an utterance by Neville describing their relative positions, and having an under-current of prophecy:—"In describing my own imperfections, you must not suppose I am describing my sister's. She has come out of the disadvantages of our miserable life as much better

than I am as that Cathedral tower is higher than those chimneys." Whatever his part had been, or would be, the sister's was to be greater, and coming events were casting their shadows before.

This perfect community of feeling accounts for a good deal. It is offered as an explanation of one of the earlier episodes in the lives of both, and that episode may be accepted unreservedly as a microscopic picture of the greater event that was to follow.

"Nothing in our misery ever subdued her, though it often cowed me," said Neville to Mr. Crisparkle. "When we ran away (we ran away four times in six years, to be soon brought back and cruelly punished) the flight was always of her planning and leading. *Each time she dressed as a boy and showed the daring of a man.* I take it we were seven years old when we first decamped."

Of the many signals flashed out at intervals along the course of the story this is the most luminous of all. It is the preliminary proof of all that was possible. It is the rough draft for the later development. It is the plot in little that is to be duplicated and enlarged. She planned the flight, she dressed as a boy, she showed the daring of a man—at the age of seven. Animated by the strongest of motives this same

girl, at twenty, assuredly would and could show all the daring of a man once more; and Datchery, dogging the steps of Jasper, needed a spirit that was absolutely indomitable.

When her task was finished in Cloisterham, and, in her own character, she had done all that was possible for her brother, she went to London. From that moment the author keeps her movements concealed. Though we are led to believe she is there we have little enough evidence of the fact. She went, but did she stay? Should she disappear, Neville, with whom she had that complete understanding, that one-ness of feeling, would keep the secret. It would be in his nature to do so, and it would be his policy. Mr. Grewgious was the only other person who knew of her movements, and that he had a thorough understanding of all that was going on is plain from many passages. But the logic of the case almost demands that we should regard Grewgious and Helena as acting in partnership. He watched Jasper in London, apparently knew just when to expect him, and attached great importance to keeping him in view. It was doubly important to watch him in Cloisterham, and Grewgious, the lawyer, would scarcely have been so lacking in discrimination as to content himself with a vigilation in London during brief and spas-

modic visits. Jasper spent most of his time in Cloisterham, and only slunk up to the city at intervals; Grewgious, therefore, would never have been satisfied unless the suspect were as closely watched in the one place as the other. That he knew what Helena was doing and that there was intercommunication is abundantly manifest. Her movements could not have been concealed from him, owing to the proximity of their rooms, and there were strong reasons for each confiding in the other and working conjointly. Any time Helena was required she could be in London in a few hours—and this, doubtless, is one reason why she did not cut off her hair (as she had done when a child), but took refuge in the disguise of the big wig. Another reason was that the handsome girl, in love with Canon Crisparkle, would not disfigure herself as long as any other resort was possible. It is by a seeming trifle, yet weighted with its usual significance, that Dickens reveals the likelihood of a close understanding between Grewgious and Helena Landless.

When Rosa fled to London after Jasper's insolent avowals and dark threats, Mr. Grewgious at once showed her the rooms of Helena and Neville from his own window. "I may go to Helena to-morrow?" asked Rosa. There

was no apparent reason why she should not. It was but a few steps away; Rosa and Helena were united by friendship; there was no danger in their meeting, but every chance of advantage. Yet to the innocent request Mr. Grewgious replied—"I should like to sleep on that question to-night." So far as the story is concerned it does not matter to the reader whether the reply was given one day or another. But if the author wished to suggest something beneath the surface the delay and the caution were clever artifices. Why, then, did Mr. Grewgious defer his answer? There can be only one conjecture. We are to understand by this most casual of trifles a very substantial fact—*Helena was not there*. But next day she had returned, and Grewgious then admitted that it was highly important Helena should "privately know from Miss Rosa's lips what had occurred and what had been threatened." A remarkable change in twelve hours!

Dickens, always apprehensive lest his secret should be guessed, and that he should be disclosing too much, makes the usual "explanation" to throw the solution-hunter off the scent. The reason Grewgious had hesitated was that Jasper might be spying on them—a reason which would have been as well advanced on the morrow as overnight. The fact remains that Grewgious

wanted Helena to know everything, and this again lends colour to the theory that the two were in collaboration. Helena's conduct at this point is also worth scrutinising. She at once conceives a scheme for checkmating Jasper, and pertinently inquires whether "it would be best to wait until any more maligning and pursuing of Neville on the part of this wretch shall disclose itself, or to try to anticipate it?" She is in full activity. She is prepared, not to begin operations, but to conclude them if necessary. Dickens at this point had revealed her hand, and then, for the rest of the story, he spirits her away. After this important conference Helena Landless vanishes from the story. But Dick Datchery re-appears in Cloisterham!

Datchery's peculiarities, which are all that Dickens gives us as evidence to use or ignore as we please, should now be once more reviewed.*

* An objection may be made that no woman would partake of the food that is described as Datchery's meals; first, "a fried sole, veal cutlet, and pint of sherry" at the Crozier, and secondly, "bread and cheese, salad, and ale" at Mrs. Tope's. But the objection fades away when we remember that dining habits have changed, and that Helena Landless, if Datchery, would have to act up to the part she had assumed. To call, for example, for a cup of tea, would have been to reveal femininity at once; moreover, sherry was the cheaper and the more conventional beverage of the times. As for the ale, even schoolboys drank it in those days, as Dickens himself tells us in various sketches; and what little David Copperfield could partake of would not injure a healthy young woman.

The shaking of his hair, and the carrying of his hat under his arm have provided the first clues to identification. "I'll call on *Mrs. Tope*," he says with alacrity when searching for lodgings, although Mr. Tope had first been mentioned, but a woman would prefer to call on another woman. When Datchery is returning to his lodgings at night and sees Jasper's red light burning, his "wistful gaze" is "directed to this beacon, and beyond." Why "wistful," and what lay "beyond"? Datchery's hopes did not end with tracking a murderer. There was "a haven beyond that might never be reached," a haven only to be reached after "a dangerous voyage." Love! that love which was almost idolatrous, and towards which a lonely woman might well look wistfully beyond the warning lights that marked her present course.

The old opium woman, journeying to Cloisterham the second time, encountered Datchery by accident. When she mentioned Edwin Drood's name Datchery "reddened"—"with exertion" adds Dickens, eager for further explanation. He dare not let the single statement stand alone. Every track to the solution must be covered up as soon as momentarily revealed.

In this deceptive book a special warning should be inscribed—"Beware of explanations." Whenever Dickens explained he was impeding,

not helping, the reader. He tells us that Jasper wore a silk scarf—"a large black scarf of strong, close-woven silk, slung loosely round his neck"; and he offers an explanation. It is because the mechanism of his throat is a little tender—a belated reason, and not true. So when he explains that Datchery reddens "with exertion"—the exertion, forsooth, of picking up a copper!—he is merely throwing us off the scent, and trying to persuade us that the reddening could not arise from any other cause—as, for instance, the rush of blood to the face when a person has been startled.

Datchery's system of investigation is exactly the one that Helena Landless would adopt, and no other in the story. When Sapsea relates Drood's inexplicable story Datchery's query at once is—"Are there any strong suspicions of anyone?" He wants to know everything concerning Neville Landless, and is more concerned for him than anyone else. Datchery is no sooner introduced to Durdles than he remarks—"I suppose a curious stranger might come to see you and your works any time?" and on being told yes, says "I shall come," and arranges on the spot that the boy Deputy shall show him the way. The object is to ascertain if Durdles knows anything. The woman also instinctively seeks the presence of

a second person. Durdles undoubtedly was to be a link in the case, though what he knew had no meaning for himself. His whole demeanour was that of a man who had no conception of possessing any testimony whatever. He could not have kept his secret: he was not conscious that he held one. But the chances are that he had heard a wild cry on the fateful Christmas Eve, that he had again thought it "the ghost of a cry," and associated it with his previous dream. This was a style of coincidence to which Dickens was much addicted. Equally, the boy who had been in waiting for Durdles, according to invariable custom, had seen his hated enemy Jasper, though he was oblivious to the bearing that this had upon the mystery. Helena's task was to piece together these insignificant items, to accumulate the incriminating facts, thus convicting Jasper, and saving Neville and Rosa.

By the time the story had reached its first half she had made progress, as the chalk-marks prove. Why did she resort to this clumsy method? Obviously, Datchery, if a woman, must write nothing. The woman would have been betrayed at once by her penmanship.* If

* Women at this period were taught to write the Italian "pointed" hand, with flourishes; the men, a "round" hand. The styles were distinct, and the sex of a writer would be easily determined.

she must keep a score at all it must be by some non-committal process, and the chalked lines on a cupboard door would not compromise her in the least. Whether Dickens intended any other object to be served is a futile speculation. Suffice it that the chalk-mark system suited a woman's purpose, and was the only visual evidence possible that could enable her to see at a glance whether her labours were making for success. Only three marks had been scored up to the time the story came to an end, and they may thus be analysed:—

I. The “very poor score,” made up to the time of Datchery's meeting the opium woman. Nothing substantial had been gained so far, because Datchery had simply done the preliminary work of making the acquaintance, in a new character, of Jasper, Sapsea, Durdles, and Deputy.

II. The “modest stroke,” made after the meeting with the opium woman. This meeting had suggested much, but had resulted in so little that was definite and pertinent that only the “modest stroke” was justified.

III. The “thick line extending from the top of the cupboard door to the bottom,” indicating the reality of the opium woman's hostility towards Jasper, her strenuous purpose in following him, and connecting the “threatened

Ned" with the man now almost definitely associated with the utterer of the threat—that is, the potential murderer. The "thick line" was indeed required for a sudden access of evidence such as that.

What, it will be asked, of Helena's voice? Would it not betray her to Jasper? Here is one of the best proofs of the manner in which Dickens, foreseeing a danger, contrived to avert it. First, he continually impressed upon the reader that Helena's voice was "rich and low," in other words, a voice that, while issuing seemingly from a man, aroused no natural suspicion that it might be the voice of a woman. Yet Jasper, the person chiefly concerned, had an unusually delicate ear, and a specimen of his acuteness had already been given in respect to the clinking of the keys. Therefore it was likely the "rich and low" tones would awaken reminiscences if he were already familiar with them. Now comes the strange fact. So far as the records in the story go, Helena and Jasper only met once face to face (Chap. VII.), and it is of the utmost significance that on that occasion Dickens does not represent them as exchanging a single word. She was standing with an arm round Rosa, and watching Jasper, who was seated at the piano; and when Rosa fainted and Helena caught her up, Jasper still remained at the instrument. Drood put to her

the penetrating question—"You would be afraid of him under similar circumstances?" to which Helena made the reply, intended by Dickens to serve as a signal to the reader as well as a warning to the music-master, "Not under any circumstances." Jasper heard it, although it was not addressed to him, and shortly afterwards stole away. It was the only phrase from Helena in his ears, and there it was intended to linger, and to be recalled at the dramatic moment. But those four words, spoken aside, could not have familiarised Jasper with her voice, and when Datchery appeared, the sound, though perhaps not the words, had been forgotten. The question is therefore easily and unreservedly answered. But suppose Datchery had not been Helena—suppose it was Drood or Grewgious? Then their speech would have immediately betrayed them. Voices cannot be long disguised, though faces may be, and one of the best proofs as to who Datchery was *not* is found in the circumstance that the "old buffer's" tones were unrecognised by the man whose ear was trained to be acute.

Thus it will be seen that the arguments which favour Helena Landless are unexpectedly destructive to the remaining theories. It now remains to be seen whether, with Helena as Nemesis, the story could have been brought to a conclusion at once admirable and surprising.

Chapter VII.

THE THIRD MYSTERY: THE OPIUM WOMAN.

THERE must be a brief pause on the way to examine one other matter hitherto overlooked.

The first two mysteries of "Edwin Drood" are, as now becomes clear, intimately interwoven, and the strands of the one cannot be disentangled without snapping the strands of the other. The third mystery, though not quite separable from the others, works out independently of them; it does not concern the fate of Edwin Drood or the identification of Datchery. It has also this difference, that it is a mystery to which the author himself supplied practically no clues, and therefore at best only a guess may be hazarded as to its solution. But we may safely assume that Dickens, so thorough an artist and so intent upon wasting no details in the development of his plot, did not intend this important character to have no consequence, to be put aside as negligible material in the drama, and to be omitted from the series of surprises awaiting the reader in the conclusion. Everything tends to establish the fact that, apart from what others were doing to convict Jasper, she would individually exercise an influence

upon his fate. The story as conceived by Dickens can probably only be fitly concluded by assigning this woman her place, by learning who she was, and by determining what her motives were for a strange series of actions. And though all this is purely conjectural, yet, with a knowledge of Dickens's methods, and by a close scrutiny of the trend of the story, we can almost dare to be positive in a declaration on this matter.

All that we know of the opium woman is that Jasper was one of her customers in London; that she wished to trace him, and got as far as Cloisterham; that there she met Drood and warned him of the danger she vaguely knew was threatening "Ned"—the inference being that Jasper had divulged this in his sleep; that on a second occasion, after Drood had disappeared, the woman again went to Cloisterham, and was determined "not to miss him this time," her zeal being whetted by a recent visit of Jasper to her den, when in his sleep he had confessed to actions which hinted at the horrible fate of a fellow-traveller; that on this second occasion she met Datchery; and that she evinced an active hatred of Jasper when she saw him in the Cathedral, and declared that she knew him "far better than all the reverend parsons put together knew him."

Her persistence in pursuing him, her frantic efforts to extort something incriminating from him in his sleep, and her listening to his rambling talk, all show method and deep motive.

The opium woman was a sketch from life.

“In a miserable court at night,” Forster quotes Mr. Fildes as saying in regard to a visit paid by Dickens and himself, “we found a haggard old woman blowing at a kind of pipe made of an old ink-bottle; and the words that Dickens puts into the mouth of this wretched creature in ‘Edwin Drood’ we heard her croon as we leaned over the tattered bed in which she was lying.” This incident occurred in the autumn of 1869, and Dickens would perceive the opportunity of making good use of such a character in the story he was then contemplating. The woman was known as “Lascar Sal,” and she was living as late as 1875. The Chinaman and rival, of whom she was so jealous, was George Ah Sing, who had a den in Cornwall Road, St. George’s-in-the-West. He died in 1889.

The connection between Jasper and the opium woman is only a surmise. That she was to have an important and perhaps determining influence in the end is unmistakable. Yet her own primary object was not to track Jasper down as the murderer of Edwin Drood. We learn at a

late stage in the story that even the first time Jasper's visit to her is recorded she was watching him, and pretending to sleep when she was awake in order to observe his movements. On the second occasion of our acquaintance with the woman she was in Cloisterham, and met Edwin Drood. "I came here," she told him, "looking for a needle in a haystack, and I ain't found it." She was, in fact, looking for Jasper. She knew he was in the neighbourhood, but had missed him. Drood was alive, and she wanted Jasper for some purpose of her own. And this much she knew—that "Ned" was "a threatened name, a dangerous name." Thus she would become in the first place another of the witnesses with testimony of the value of which she was ignorant.

After the murder, she followed Jasper to Cloisterham, determined "not to miss him this time." She had heard his rambling talk in the opium den, the account of a journey with a relative; she heard he had done something he had "determined to do"; she had learnt from his lips that "when it was really done, it seemed not worth the doing, it was done so soon." He had told her of his vision, and had concluded with a start—"And yet I never saw *that* before." The old woman had made him talk, but his talk was "unintelligible." She hated

this man she wheedled, and seemingly had a revengeful object in tracking him to his home. But her object was personal. Edwin Drood was nothing to her, and his fate later on would not concern her.

Who, then, was she? We make a guess, for Dickens gives us no solid facts. But when we remember that not a word is said throughout the volume of Jasper's antecedents, who he was, and where he came from; when we remember that but for his nephew he was a lonely man; when we see that he was both criminal and artist; when we observe his own wheedling propensity, his false and fulsome protestations of affection, his slyness, his subtlety, his heartlessness, his tenacity; and when, above all, we know that the opium vice is *hereditary*, and that a *young* man would not be addicted to it unless born with the craving; then, it is not too wild a conjecture that Jasper was the wayward progeny of this same opium-eating woman, all of whose characteristics he possessed, and, perchance, of a man of criminal instincts, but of a superior position. Jasper is a morbid and diseased being while still in the twenties, a mixture of genius and vice. He hates and he loves fiercely, as if there were wild gipsy blood in his veins. Though seemingly a model of decorum and devoted to his art, he complains

of his "daily drudging round" and "the cramped monotony of his existence." He commits his crime with the ruthlessness of a beast, his own nature being wholly untamed. If we deduce that his father was an adventurer and a vagabond we shall not be far wrong. If we deduce that his mother was the opium eater, prematurely aged, who had transmitted her vicious propensity to her child, we shall almost certainly be right.

Her purpose is left obscure. How easily, however, we see possibilities in a direction such as this—The father, perhaps a proud, handsome man, deserts the woman, and removes the child. The woman hates both for scorning her, but the father dies, or disappears, and is beyond her vengeance. Then the child, victim to the ills in his blood, creeps back to the opium den, not knowing his mother, but immediately recognised by her. She will make the child suffer for the sins of the father, who had destroyed her happiness. Such a theme was one which appealed to Dickens. It must not, however, be urged; and the crucial question after all is concerned with the opium woman as one of the unconscious instruments of justice, aiding with her trifle of circumstantial evidence the Nemesis awaiting Jasper.

Another hypothesis—following on the Carker

theme in "Dombey and Son"—is that Jasper, a dissolute and degenerate man, lascivious, and heartless—may have wronged a child of the woman's; but it is not likely that Dickens would repeat the Mrs. Brown story.

Suffice it that we are made to understand that this woman was to be a link in the scattered details of a most complicated plot. She was also incidentally to help forward the solution of the Datchery problem, and to enable us to learn by inference that Datchery was not Drood. Let us examine the details more closely.

Drood knew the old opium eater, and knew her well, because he had seen her in a fit like Jasper's, and "had looked down at her in a dread amazement." "Good heavens!" he thought. "Like Jack that night!" She had warned him of the threat against "Ned," and he had decided "to mention it to Jack (who alone calls him Ned) as an odd coincidence." He gave her money for opium. If, therefore, Drood were Datchery he would at once recognise this hag of so striking an appearance, and would also associate her with the man who had tried to murder him. But Datchery did not know her when the accidental encounter took place in Cloisterham some months later. If Drood had met her again, he would immediately have remembered the warning, associated it with

Jasper's subsequent attack upon him, and seen the value of her evidence. Now, even when the woman mentioned Jasper's name it suggested nothing to Datchery. Nor was he even aware that this woman, like Jasper, was addicted to drugs. It was only when she told him so herself, that "with a sudden change of countenance, he gives her a sudden look." Drood would not have changed countenance on hearing a fact he had known six months previously. But the announcement was a surprise and a piece of information for Datchery; and his agitation was still greater—so great that he dropped his money—when the woman added that "last Christmas Eve"—the fatal day—"the young gentleman gave me the three and six . . . and the young gentleman's name was Edwin." If she had been speaking to Edwin himself, he would not have followed this up with the fatuously unnecessary question—"How do you know the young gentleman's name?" The hero of the incident would have held his peace. But Datchery was confused by the turn of events. He had learnt something, though it led to nothing tangible, and so at the end of the day, when he regarded the chalked-up score which was so far a "very poor one," he only added "a moderate stroke." "It is all I am *justified* in scoring up," he commented,

and that was true. Edwin Drood, who would have learnt nothing new whatever, could not have added a stroke at all. But next day, when Datchery saw the woman's animus against Jasper, he had something definite to go on, something more than bare suspicion, and so "one thick line" was added to the score. The score is "illegible except to the scorer. The scorer not committed, the scored debited with what is against him." There was something very heavy against John Jasper when Datchery pieced his facts together—an opium woman's journey from London to find another opium eater, her hatred of him, and her divulgence of the fact that she had met Edwin Drood on Christmas Eve. Nothing new to Edwin Drood, if alive, recovered from the miscreant's attack—yet new, and of the deepest importance to this Datchery.

With all that we thus learn, and with all we are permitted to surmise, we can now with some confidence forecast Dickens's mapped-out finale to "Edwin Drood" and all its mysteries.

Chapter VIII.

FROM CLUE TO CONCLUSION.

To attempt, as some have done, to write a second half of *Edwin Drood* in imitation of Dickens's own style, is sheer presumption, not to say sacrilege. All that we are justified in doing is to indicate, after examining the facts supplied in the first half, the most probable course the story would have taken, and what the conclusion is that most reasonably and satisfactorily accounts for all that has gone before, leaving as few "loose ends" as possible in the completed design.

Forster thinks that probably Dickens had become a little nervous about the course of the tale, from "a fear that he might have plunged too soon into the incidents leading on to the catastrophe, such as the Datchery assumption in the fifth number (a misgiving he had certainly expressed to his sister-in-law)." The biographer, in reproducing the discarded chapter on Mr. Sapsea and the Eight Club, remarks that Dickens may have wished to introduce new characters to suspend the final development. I do not take it that the Eight Club was to serve this purpose; in its concluding portion it is but

a draft of the dialogue between Sapsea and Datchery. (Chap. XVIII.) But Billickin and the Bazzard story keep the stage waiting for the principal characters, and successfully check the progress of the story.

Proctor has shown us what the termination of the story must have been if Datchery were Edwin Drood. Contrast that conclusion, Edwin's aimless "looking on," with the conclusion that could be wrought if there were no Edwin there, and if—after Dickens had done his best to make us believe Jasper's crime was incomplete—we learnt suddenly that it was *quite* complete, and that the proofs of guilt were complete also. If Drood were dead, then we see the need for Durdles and "Deputy" as witnesses; if he were not dead, they are superfluous. Imagine, too, the intense power of the dramatic climax when Datchery, the elderly man, is re-transformed into Helena Landless, the young and handsome woman; and when she reveals the seemingly impenetrable secret which had been closed up in one guilty man's mind.

To the author there would be no great difficulty in arranging the murder itself, ingenious as it was. The difficulty was in solving the mystery without letting the reader too early into the secret. To communicate the idea was to spoil the story forthwith. To define Helena

Landless as Datchery was to resolve the mystery, for then we should know too surely that Drood was dead, without working the facts out for ourselves. Therefore Dickens had to hold everything in suspense. Helena, though much talked of, is constantly in the background. When it would seem that the development was coming too fast our attention is diverted to other characters, such as Bazzard and Billickin. Dickens covers up his tracks as frequently as possible. Sometimes he wants us to forget, and at other times he wants us to take a wrong turning.

Part of a further surprise in the story would have awaited the reader in finding that in this tale, without an orthodox hero and with but a very uncertain heroine, the real hero and heroine in moral worth and strength of deed, were undoubtedly to be Mr. Grewgious and Helena Landless.

The conclusion of "Edwin Drood," following the chain of links, would most likely have taken some such form as this.

Jasper's plot had succeeded, and Edwin Drood was dead. He died by the hand of his uncle, jealous of the love of Rosa. The scheme of murder had been arranged to a nicety, and fortune had unexpectedly favoured its completion.

On Christmas Eve Edwin Drood and Neville Landless had supper at Jasper's house. The great storm came up, and its strife and noise and devastation aided Jasper in his project. At midnight the two young men went to the river to see the effects. We mentally perceive what followed when they had parted. Neville returned home, and his way lay in an opposite direction to Edwin's. Near the Cathedral Jasper intercepted his nephew, and now the slow, deliberate tragedy began. Edwin may have been already drugged, for Jasper had a mania for this, and would require it as a precaution. Inside the Cathedral lay Durdles, sleeping off the fumes of drink as he had done on the Christmas Eve of a year before. Outside in the darkness was the boy-fiend, Deputy, waiting to stone Durdles home because he was out "arter ten." So, we may surmise, Dickens intended to group his characters.

The storm raged. Above its tumult there came one shrill agonised cry—like the "ghost of a cry," again, like "the howl of a dog." The black silk scarf was tightened round the victim's throat. But Durdles had heard he knew not what, and Deputy had seen what he could not understand. Someone else must translate and interpret—later on.

From that night Drood was never seen again.

The next morning Jasper announced his disappearance, and immediately diverted suspicion upon Neville, the last one known to be in his company. By subtlety, innuendo, and the seizure upon all scraps of evidence which favoured the hypothesis, Jasper proceeded to build up the strongest case possible short of demonstration against the young man; and then with confidence—nay, with an absolutely impudent and defiant resolution—he dared to expose his actual feelings to Rosa. On this subject he was perfectly easy, knowing as he did that Drood would never interpose. He could do more than make love to Rosa; he could openly threaten her friends. If he had had the slightest doubt he would never have revealed his hand to this extent.

But he knew Drood was dead, and not only dead, but turned to dust by quicklime. He had cautiously removed all the jewellery of which he had an inventory, and thrown it into the river at the very place where Mr. Crisparkle, a good swimmer and a constant bather, was likely to find it. He foresaw that when this was found the suspicion against Neville could be further strengthened.

Only one morsel of evidence was left. Grewgious had entrusted Edwin with the betrothal ring of gold and rubies to give to Rosa. The

lad had kept it. He had said nothing of it. It was in his possession on Christmas Eve. Jasper could make no guess at such an article. Quicklime would not destroy it. In very truth, as it lay in the vault where the body had been cast it would prove to be "a chain forged in the vast ironworks of time and circumstance, riveted to the foundations of heaven and earth, and gifted with invincible force to hold and drag."

Proctor, whose theory compels him to ignore this fact, says that potent passage is without meaning, and must be disregarded.

"Hold and drag!" Could there be words more pregnant? The ring was to hold Jasper to his crime and drag him to his doom.

But a human agency was required. The secret ring in its secret place was useless. Now there is a call for the watcher, the tracker down, the avenger.

There were three at work—Datchery at Cloisterham, Grewgious in London, and the opium woman waiting to hear what Jasper would babble in his sleep. Dickens obviously intended the criminal to betray himself at the critical moment. The words that Jasper let fall concerning his journey, his fellow-companion, the deed that was scarce worth the doing, the sight that he had never witnessed before, were practically a confession, but "unintelligible"—one of the key-

words in the story, given in the first chapter, and repeated with strange force at intervals. Datchery had to prepare the way for definite results and clear understandings. And up to the time the story was arrested, Datchery had learnt a few vital facts.

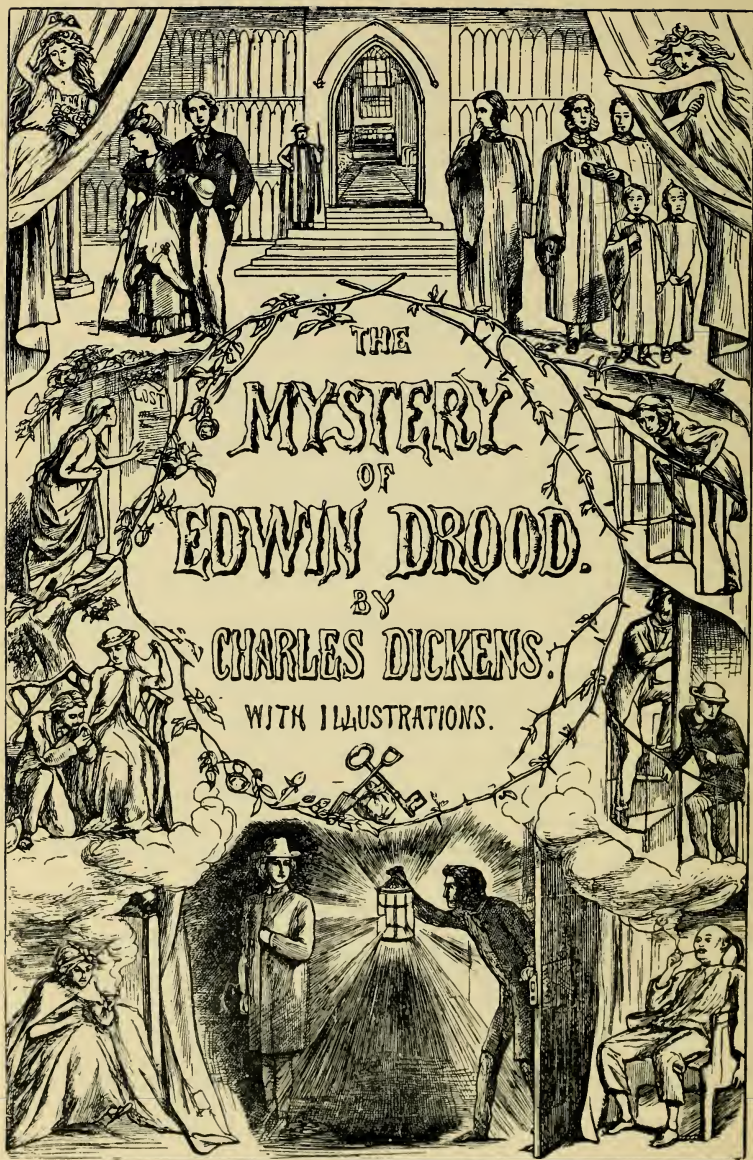
The first hint was probably to fall from Durdles, who, when Datchery visited him by arrangement, would repeat his story of hearing the "ghost of a cry" for the second time on a Christmas Eve. The cry coincided with the time of Drood's disappearance. The second hint would come from Deputy, who had seen Jasper, his enemy, with another man near the Cathedral, and had perhaps even seen Jasper carrying his burden towards the Sapsea vault. Deputy might be able to state the exact time of the occurrence, or in some other way peculiar to Dickens's methods to associate what he had seen with what Durdles had heard. Datchery at all events would now have two threads in his hands, and be enabled to connect them. The man, the scene, the time, were all known.

But where was the missing body? Datchery would not think of the Sapsea vault unaided. Now Durdles is useful again. Tapping with his hammer he would find a change; the exact nature we do not know, but the vault had been tampered with; inquiry must be made. What-

ever else the vault contained, or whatever had disappeared, one thing is certain—the betrothal ring that Grewgious had given to Edwin Drood would be lying there. There was no difficulty in identification, and Bazzard was an independent witness to confirm Grewgious's statement that the ring had been delivered to Edwin, and to no other. He had not placed it on Rosa's finger, and he had not returned it; the circumstances therefore rendered it impossible that it could have passed out of his own possession. Thus Datchery finds the whole mystery beginning to thin away in the light that comes.

Grewgious had testimony to give also of the effect on Jasper when he told him of the broken engagement. What the lawyer actually knew or only suspected at the moment he made his announcement and watched its effects is debatable, but the very manner in which he approached Jasper and subsequently treated him, followed as it was by his unreserved declaration that Jasper was a scoundrel, suggests much. He has also evidence to tender of Jasper's conduct in London, and where his story ends the story of the opium woman begins.

She had watched Jasper for a reason of her own, but none the less she would have material testimony to offer on the subject of the crime. Jasper, on the last visit he paid to the den, had



Facsimile of Collins's Illustrated Cover to "Edwin Drood."

(By permission of Messrs. Chapman and Hall.)

already begun to babble; he would not stop. It might be also that he had begun to suspect he was watched, and it might be that Dickens intended that panic-stricken he should return to the vault to see if every trace of the crime had been removed—there to find Datchery awaiting him. It was a favourite method of Dickens for the avenger to summon the victim to the place where retribution would overtake him.* Datchery could accomplish this, and Jasper, at the psychological moment, would be arrested. This was suggested in Collins's cover illustration—the surprise to be experienced by the murderer at the tomb in which Edwin had been immured. That this sudden confrontation would have an awful effect, and that it was to be brought about in a most sensational manner, cannot be doubted.

Reference must now be made to the series of pictures which appeared upon the original wrapper of "Edwin Drood," and a fac-simile of which, by kind permission of Messrs. Chapman and Hall, is reproduced in this volume. The artist was Charles Alston Collins (brother of Wilkie Collins), who had married Dickens's

* Pecksniff, summoned to Martin Chuzzlewit's house; Wegg, brought to bay at Boffin's; Lady Dedlock at her lover's tomb; Nancy, lured to her doom by Sykes; Evremonde, tricked back to Paris;—all these are, in greater or minor degree, instances of the same dramatic purpose.

younger daughter Kate in 1860. The connection between author and artist was therefore close and probably confidential.

The first point to be noticed is that the pictures must have been inspired by Dickens, because at least one of them anticipated a scene that was never reached in the novel. Indeed, a picture to be more particularly described hereafter, apparently presents the final episode in the story. The second point to be noticed is that the illustrations were perfectly satisfactory to the author. "Charles Collins has designed an excellent cover," he wrote. Forster tells us that it was his wish that the son-in-law should have illustrated the story; but this proving impracticable the choice fell upon Mr. Luke Fildes.

A matter of personal interest may now be mentioned. When the theory in this volume was set forth the illustrations on the cover had not been examined. On the conclusion of the whole work the pictures were referred to for the first time, and were then found to support in the most striking manner the opinions arrived at. It is, of course, open to argument what some of the pictures mean, but my own interpretation is as follows:—

Commencing at the top we have in the corners symbolical figures of Comedy and Tragedy or

Love and Revenge. Between them spreads the wide scene, with the Cathedral in the background, which includes the characters in the main theme—Edwin and Rosa on the one side, the jealous Jasper on the other. Edwin's face and attitude express his indifference—his gaze is elsewhere, not devoted to the woman at his side. She has averted her face entirely; her parasol drags loosely on the ground; her dejection is unmistakable. These are the two, arm in arm yet apart in spirit, whose betrothal has not meant union, but only fettering; friendship has never quickened into love. But on the other side is the Lay Precentor who cannot hide his desperate passion, who intently watches the woman he loves and the man he intends to sweep from his path—the victim, how thoroughly unconscious of his impending fate! It is on that side, where Jasper stands, that the Atë-like figure is lurking with dishevelled hair and bared steel ready to strike.

The second picture on the left, with a mournful woman looking into a blank region over which the word "Lost" has been inscribed needs no detailed interpretation. Drood has vanished: Rosa is alone. Beneath is the picture which we connect with Luke Fildes's illustration of Jasper's mad and unrestrained declaration to Rosa in the garden. There is a certain appo-

priateness that the fumes from the old opium woman's pipe rise envelopingly to their feet. On the right, exactly opposite, are the opium fumes again, blown from the rival Chinaman's pipe, and reaching to Jasper's feet. The opium vice underlies the whole history of the "Mystery of Edwin Drood."

The two small intermediate pictures on the right relate to Jasper's "unaccountable expedition" with Durdles to the Cathedral. In Chapter XII. Jasper "ascended the great Tower," and it was whilst upon the steps leading from the Crypt that Durdles told the story of his hearing "the ghost of a cry" on the previous Christmas Eve. Jasper afterwards "rises suddenly," mounts the steps, and the two men "go up the winding staircase . . . up among the cobwebs and the dust . . . until at last they look down on Cloisterham. . . . An unaccountable expedition this!"

The episode was fraught with meanings, and in the last stages of the story we should have learnt all the use to which the murderer put it.

In the centre is the title of the story, in a framework consisting of roses on the one side, thorns on the other, the branches crossing at the top. Beneath are shown the key, the spade, and the bundle of the mason Durdles. The roses, it will be observed, stretch out to form

part of the border environing Rosa; the thorns reach correspondingly to Jasper, the spikes pointing downward menacingly. The allegory is perfect.

The last picture is most important and most impressive of all. A man with a lantern is entering a darkened chamber, scattering light before him. The rays fall on another figure—obviously unexpected. That figure is a strange one. Is it a man or a woman in man's apparel? Is it the mysterious Datchery? No picture of Datchery was given in Fildes's subsequent drawings, so we have nothing to guide us there. But the large hat, and the tightly-buttoned surtout must be observed; they are the articles of clothing on which most stress is laid in the description of Datchery. But the face is a *young* face. And the look upon it is one of calm expectancy.

If Jasper, panic-stricken at finding the web closing about him, rushed to the Crypt to ascertain if, after all, incriminating evidence remained, or if he were brought there by any agency, and then found the Avenger awaiting him—Helena Landless in the disguise of Datchery; then Dickens had a situation of such intensity and power as to justify him in believing that this story, both in plan and execution, would demonstrate his consummate ability to

construct a plot of the most thrilling and dramatic character. And that there was to be some such climax we learn from Forster's own statement:—

“Discovery by the murderer of the utter needlessness of the murder for its object, was to follow hard upon commission of the deed; but all discovery of the murder was to be baffled till towards the close, when, *by means of a gold ring*, which had resisted the corrosive effects of the lime into which he had thrown the body, not *only the person murdered was to be identified, but the locality of the crime and the man who committed it.*”*

I take it that Jasper would be lured to the very spot, and awaited. Either he would fly there in fear, or be induced to visit the scene by a cunning device. His arrest, condemnation, confession, and suicide by poison, are possibilities all hinted at. As was usual with Dickens, justice would triumph, and, as far as possible, the murderer's instruments would be turned against himself.

But indubitably there was to be one more death before the story ended, and ended, in all

* By way of a final word on Proctor's theory, it should be mentioned that he ignores the whole of this statement which Forster made on Dickens's authority. The importance of the ring he put aside, and the prophetic picture by Collins, he was unable to allude to.

other respects, happily. Neville Landless was marked out for death in the Dickens manner as surely as Ham Peggotty, or as Sydney Carton. He would die nobly. Proctor, believing Drood to be alive, thinks Neville would be killed by the frenzied Jasper when saving Edwin—whom he disliked—from attack. How much stronger, how much finer, how much worthier, if, when Datchery threw off disguise and Helena Landless was revealed, and if, when the infuriated murderer at bay aimed at her breast a deadly blow, the brother for whom she had done so much and who stood forth gloriously vindicated, in that supreme moment of happiness and victory, gladly gave his life for hers!

Finis coronat opus.

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The conclusions thus arrived at are founded purely upon the evidence contained in the story as Dickens left it. They accord with his expressed intentions. They agree with the outlines of the original project as John Forster learnt them. And they enable the plot to be completed in a manner that is at once logical, novel, and surprising. Every character is accounted for, and every trifle of evidence is used. There are no gaps anywhere, and no

forced arguments. Naturally and convincingly the strange theme reaches the appointed end—that end so clearly perceived by the author, that end which he so ingeniously sought to conceal from others. Helena Landless, instead of being a wasted character or reserved for no better purpose than to pair off with Mr. Crisparkle, turns her peculiar powers to full account. Drood, instead of emerging miraculously from nowhere, escaped from the hands of the clever culprit who was positive he had killed him and had shaped a daring course accordingly—Drood, instead of being restored to breathe a final blessing on his old sweetheart when she married someone else—becomes the hidden pivot in a world of action. Jasper, instead of being a bungler, is shown to be the thorough-paced criminal well deserving of all the genius devoted to ensnaring him. Grewgious, instead of preserving the secret of Drood's escape, which would do infinite mischief to those who were his first care, is shown to be a sensible, dogged man intent on justice. Which of the two conclusions is Dickens likeliest to have contrived?

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Was it worth while to get to the heart of this mystery? Assuredly it was, for in so doing we get to the heart of the author himself. We

see him in his last years a master of method. He had been inspired with a new idea; the fire of enthusiasm had blazed forth; he had risen to a fresh opportunity; and with all the old zest and thoroughness he had concentrated himself upon a supreme task. It was one that demanded all his resources, and that required the exercise of powers which had never been so taxed before. He did not shrink from the ordeal. With infinite patience and with masterly skill he worked out his plot, every part well wrought, words, acts, characters perfectly selected. And but for One who conquers all, great would have been his triumph. The light of his genius showed no decline, but it was suddenly extinguished. And if the close study of "Edwin Drood" does no more than this it will enable us to estimate how great this man of many parts was until the very moment that the eager pen dropped from the arrested hand.

"Edwin Drood" is a torso, and as we contemplate the unfinished masterpiece we are led to realise how cunning was the hand of the craftsman who shaped it, how superb the sovereign intellect that conceived it, and how majestic would have been its proportions had he completed it.

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